

FLOOR STATEMENT
INTRODUCTION -- TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BILLS
U.S. SENATOR MIKE DEWINE
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Mr. DeWINE. Mr. President, the number one killer of those between the ages of 4 and 34 in this country today is auto fatalities. If you look at those between the ages of 16 and 25, the figures are even more exaggerated. We all know that in this country over 42,000 Americans lose their lives every year. That figure stays fairly constant. The last year we have figures for is 2002, and 42,815 of our fellow citizens lost their lives.

In fact, in the next 12 minutes, to be precise, at least one person will be killed in an automobile accident in this country, while nearly six people will be injured in just the next 60 seconds. This is a tragedy that we as a society are much too willing to tolerate. If a foreign enemy were doing this to us, we would not tolerate it. We would be up in arms. Someone said it is the equivalent of a 747 going down every two days in this country. If that were happening, of course, it would be on CNN; we would be demanding an explanation. Yet these auto fatalities that occur, hour by hour, day by day, just go on, and for some reason, we have become immune to it -- hardened to it. And, the deaths just continue.

I come to the Floor this morning to discuss five bills -- five bills that my staff and I have been working on for about the last year -- five bills that I will be introducing, but that I hope will be incorporated in the highway safety bill that we will be considering in the next several weeks. These bills are commonsense, practical ways to save lives. Each bill is built on solid evidence of what will, in fact, make a difference.

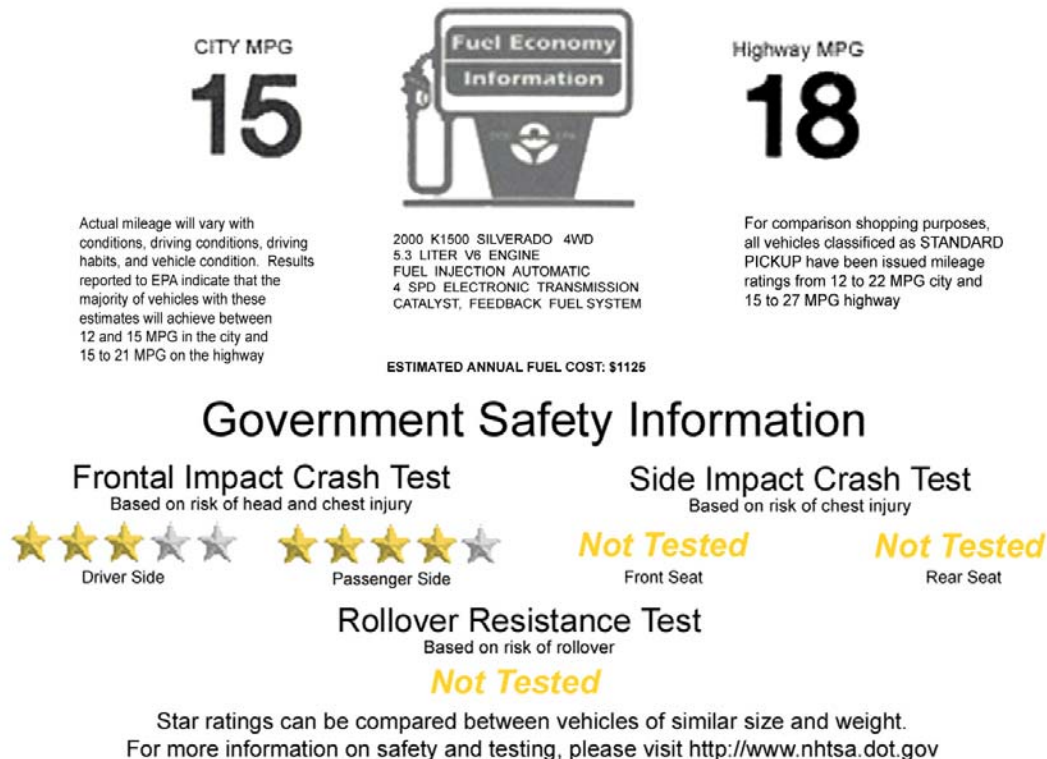
They don't cost a lot. They are a commonsense, good way to make a difference. I guarantee you one thing. If we pass them, they will save a lot of lives.

The first bill we call "Stars on Cars." When you go buy a new car, we all know what the sticker looks like. But, what we may not know is that most of the sticker is mandated by the federal government. The mileage per gallon has been on there for a number of years. The federal government says that your city mileage has to be on there. The federal government says that your highway mileage has to be on there. It has to tell you whether it has air-conditioning. It has to tell you whether it has a stereo. It has to tell you a whole bunch of other stuff.

One piece of information is not on there -- and that is highway safety.

The funny thing is you have already paid to have the federal government spend millions of dollars to test that very car. The federal government knows information about that car. In fact, the federal government has put that information up on the Internet. Yet, when you go in to buy that car, that information is not available to you. It is not available to the American consumer in the one place where it would make a difference -- where you buy the car.

This is a mockup. We simply show how it would work under our bill. It wouldn't cost the taxpayers a dime. The car companies are already printing the stickers. All we do is put the information here. Under this mockup, this is a Silverado pickup. We would add this section called "Government Safety Information." For this particular pickup, for the driver side, here is what the Government says: Out of five stars, this particular vehicle got three out of five. For the passenger side, it got four stars out of five. Over here on the side impact crash test, it was not tested. Over here on the rear seat, it was not tested either. On the rollover resistance test this particular vehicle was not tested. If it were tested, it would be there.



In the year 2000, this particular vehicle was not tested. But, most of the common cars you and I and the average American would buy have, in fact, been tested. All of that data on the frontal impact crash test, the side impact crash test, and the rollover resistance test would be there. We would have it based on the star. It is really easy to understand. That data would be there. It is already on the Internet. Now it would be available if you go look and compare. What impact would this have?

I happen to believe the consumer is better off with more information than less information on whatever we are talking about. The consumer ought to know what the Government does. The consumer ought to know that type of information. I think the consumer would make better choices. Most consumers care about safety. They will make better choices, and in all likelihood, they are going to choose safer vehicles and more lives will, in fact, be saved. It just makes good common sense to do this.

The second bill we call "Safe Kids, Safe Cars." Cars kill kids at unbelievable rates. This is the top 10 leading cause of death in the United States for the year 2001 by age group, ranked one through 10 for the leading cause of death. The leading cause of death for all age groups from 4 through 34 is traffic crashes. That is what is killing our Nation's young people -- more than cancer, more than homicide, more than fire, more than drowning, more than anything else. So we have a problem. Anything we can do to make a car safer for our kids, we should be doing it.

We know a lot of kids and a lot of adults are killed when cars roll over. The government is doing tests to see how likely a vehicle is to roll over. But, it might come as a surprise to my colleagues and to the public to know that the government is not doing any testing today to determine what happens inside the vehicle once the car begins to roll over. We test to see if it is going to roll over. What we don't test to see is what happens when it starts to roll over and when it does roll over. Our bill provides for the use of child-size dummies and the use of adult dummies to see what impact that rollover has on them.

What are you going to do if you get that information? It is going to tell us, I assume, how well those airbags in that particular vehicle deploy, how well they protect the adult, and how well they protect the child. It may be different. How well is the structure of that vehicle put together for a rollover? Does it crush on the side of the child or the adult? How well was the structure built? We don't know. And, we don't know it because we are not testing for it today. Our bill provides that we do that.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) needs to look at child-sized dummy testing and ask where we need to use them. My bill says that they need to incorporate these child dummies. We are doing so to improve safety for children.

Another area where kids are dying in cars is with power windows. NHTSA started a rulemaking to require child-safe window switches in. That is when this federal agency started making the rulemaking procedure. That rulemaking procedure is not done yet. They have not finalized the rule.

My bill tells NHTSA to finish the rulemaking process, and it requires car makers to install switches to protect kids from getting caught in power windows by making switches harder to switch inadvertently. Some car makers are already doing this. It can be done very cheaply. Companies are doing this already. Every company needs to do it. This is not an expensive proposition. There are good switches and there are bad switches. Every company needs to have the good switches.

Twenty-five children have died that we know of in the last 10 years because they have been choked to death in cars. At least 25 we know about. At least 500 people go to emergency rooms each year as a result of power window accidents. NHTSA tells us the power switches cost virtually nothing, very little.

A third bill has to do with another problem, and that is dangerous roads and intersections. Every State has them. Most States, fortunately, rank these roads. They keep a list of the bad ones. But, amazingly, there are many States that keep this information secret and don't tell the public.

Again, consumers have a right to know this information. What would you do with the information? As a parent, I might tell my 16-year-old not to go that way to the movie. At least I have the right to have that information and say go another way. It might take another 10 minutes, but go that way. Don't go by that intersection. Don't go on that curvy road. States already have that information.

The States should provide that information. If they already know it; they should provide it. And, if they don't know it, they should get it. Policymakers need this information to make decisions about how to spend money in that State on what roads to fix.

Further, States need to spend their safety money. They need to spend their safety money on safety. Our bill says they should do that, and it requires them to do it. Current law allows States to shortchange safety programs or to do other things like highway construction. I understand that, but that should not occur. Safety programs pay for new left turn lanes, lane markings, other improvements -- lifesaving improvements -- straightening roads, straightening highways, doing some relatively small things that will, in fact, save lives.

The percentage of money earmarked, set aside for safety as it comes through the highway construction bill should be spent for those safety items. We are not talking about soft safety programs; we are talking about hard construction dollars. They are still construction dollars. They will still be used for construction. They will still be used to make things happen. They should be used for safety.

The fourth bill I am introducing has to do with driver education. This is a neglected area. Again, look at our chart. These are the kids who are dying, the new drivers. It is natural; they are the inexperienced drivers. We need to try to attack this in many different ways. One way we can do it is through driver education. It is a problem. I have looked at it in my home State. I have looked at it in other States. Driver education, at best, is mediocre in this country. The federal Government cannot run it. It is a State responsibility. But, the federal government can play a small role.

My bill follows the National Transportation Safety Board's lead and recommendation and establishes the National Office of Driver Training within the Department of Transportation at NHTSA. This office would work to establish and maintain a set of best practices -- not mandates, not national standards, but just best practices -- for driver education and licensing. The bill also would provide assistance to States that implement these best practices.

Further, my bill authorizes a modest amount of money, \$20 to \$30 million annually to assist States with making their driver education and licensing programs better. For example, one of the good things we have seen in the last few years are the graduated driver's licensing laws that have come into place in the States. Each State has done it differently. That is the improvement. What most experts have seen is that there are some laws that are working and some laws that are not working. Again, the federal government cannot tell the States what to do in this area, but maybe the federal government can reward those States that are at a higher point, with a higher bar, and give some encouragement in that area.

Our fifth bill has to do with tires. Tires do not get better with age. The fact is that there are tires being sold in the market today that were manufactured a while ago. Tires are not like wine. They do not get better with age. We do not know for sure what the implications are of the aging of a tire -- a tire that was sitting on the shelf. We do know that the tire that gets old does not get better.

My bill calls for the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a scientific study into tire aging to establish exactly when and under what conditions tire age becomes a major safety problem. We know at some point it becomes a safety problem. We just do not know when and under what conditions. Currently, the date code on tire sidewalls is extremely difficult to read or decipher. There is a date there but you and I could not figure it out. The average consumer could not figure it out.

What we provide is that the Department will figure out how to do this. We will not tell them how to do it. But, we want the consumer to know when he or she buys a tire -- at the point of sale -- when that tire was manufactured. That, coupled with the information from the scientific study, will give consumers some information. Again, we will move forward in giving the consumer information about the age of the tire, knowing when it was manufactured, plus, once the study is done, the consumer will know the relevance of that information.

We have talked with the tire industry and worked with them. They want to know, frankly, what all the implications are for aging tires. They have worked hard to make their tires as safe as possible. They have done a lot in this area and improved the safety of their tires and have been cooperative in this, as well.

Ultimately, Mr. President, these five bills will go a long way. They are common sense. They will make a difference. These bills continue my work in this area. This is something I have been interested in for many years, going back to my time in the Ohio Legislature 20 years ago when I introduced the drunk driving bill, and we were able to pass a tough drunk driving bill I wrote in the Ohio Legislature. I worked for .08. It was very controversial in the Senate, but Senator LAUTENBURG and I were able to pass .08. Also, I support and am a cosponsor of Senator WARNER's bill that he introduced last year with regard to including a primary seatbelt law. I support that.

And so, these new bills represent a continuation of the great concern I have about highway safety. This issue is not a partisan issue; this is a bipartisan issue. Anytime you lose 42,815 Americans every year, highway safety is something we all have to be concerned about.

I know the bill is not on the Floor yet, but I have seen it. I have seen a draft of the safety portions of the highway bill. As currently written, the bill goes farther than any highway bill that has been before the Senate in regard to highway safety. All those who worked on the bill have put an emphasis on highway safety, and the bill, as currently written, makes a great effort to deal with highway safety. I congratulate the authors.

Our amendments, which we will have when the bill comes to the Floor, will improve on a good bill. I make that point very clear. My amendments are not in any way critical of that bill. In fact,

I hope they will be complimentary and simply add to a good product that is already a good product and will help to improve it. I will have more to say about this as we proceed on the highway construction bill when it comes to the Floor in the next few weeks.

I thank the Chair and yield the Floor.